

"HEY, YOU!" I got up and chased him into the kitchen.

He ran to his bowl. He stood next to it. It was empty. He looked up at me. "Meow. Meow." A hopeful look came over his tiny face.

I threw my hands up in the air.

"Okay, okay," I said. "You win."

— Robert W. Howington

Fort Worth TX

#### AT THE DEBBIE REYNOLDS HOLLYWOOD HOTEL

In high school some of the girls I knew carried photos of Debbie Reynolds in their wallets and wanted to be gym teachers when they grew up because that's what Debbie'd said in Photoplay she'd wanted to be till she won the Miss Burbank beauty contest and got rich and famous instead but when those girls in high school I knew grew up they all got married and had daughters they named Debbie although Debbie Reynolds' real name was Mary Frances and those Debbie Daughters had daughters they named Jennifer or Jessica, and today, here in Las Vegas, Nevada, I sit in the Bogie Bar of the Debbie Reynolds Hollywood Hotel where giant photos of dead movie stars hang on the walls, Bogie, Audrey, Joan Crawford, John Garfield and Wayne, Bill Holden, Cary Grant, Coop, Marilyn Monroe, and more, and I watch the girls, maybe some of the same ones I knew in high school, now much-older women, standing in line to buy tickets to see the Debbie Reynolds Show their hair perfectly coiffed, grey or dyed red or brown or black, wearing sequins or leather or sweats, Nikes or Doc Martens or 4-inch stiletto high heels, holding hands with their first, second, or third husband, some of the girls having had a Liz in their lives too who took away their First Love, some having gone through bankruptcy, forever unsinkable just like Debbie Reynolds, those girls smoking or laughing or staring straight ahead, thinking how soon they'll be close to Debbie Reynolds as she sings and dances on stage, a stage like the one they placed her upon in their wallets a hundred decades ago, while all the dead movie stars smile down on them, kindly, beautiful gods, forgiving the girls for not liking them best,



those Debbie Mothers, here at the Debbie Reynolds Hollywood Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada, finally content, after all these years, not to be her.

#### THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW

After my father died and I had to drop out of college for the second time to go back to being a go-go girl, my mother came to live with me to take care of my kids although she didn't approve one bit of what I did for a living, said I was just goofing off and having a good time even though I told her I wasn't, and so ashamed was she of me she lied to my grandmothers, told them I was a dancer on the Carol Burnett Show and that's why I worked nights, wore mini skirts, false hair and eyelashes, but my mother told the truth about me to her sister Vera, a divorcee like me, and when Vera came to visit, the two of them came to see me at the Playgal Club and Spike the manager gave them a front row table and a free pitcher of beer and potato chips and there they sat, wearing white gloves and Jackie Kennedy pillbox hats, Kleenexes from their purses for napkins on their laps as they watched us go-go girls dance, sling pitchers, kegs, tanks of beer to the drunken aerospace execs, construction workers, surfers, Nam-bound marines, watched us empty ashtrays, dance, wash glasses, dance, sweep up broken glass after some pool hustlers got into a fight, and dance and the next day at noon as I sat in the kitchen, nibbling my bowl of Rice Krispies, a somnolent zombie and achy from working till 3 a.m., I heard my mother outside yelling at the trashmen not to make so much noise banging trashcans, they might wake up her daughter who worked nights and her daughter worked DAMNED HARD to earn a living! It was the finest tribute my mother ever gave me and now, years later, finally I can appreciate it, now that I'm all rested up.

— Joan Jobe Smith

Long Beach CA